Chesham Urban District Council.

REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

FOR THE YEAR 1919.

THOMAS F. LONG,

Medical Officer of Health.

To the Chairman and Members of the Chesham Urban District Council.

Gentlemen,

I have pleasure in presenting for your perusal my annual report on the general health of your district, the time under consideration being the year 1919.

Physical Features and General Character of District.

These do not alter, but I feel more strongly than ever that provided houses are forthcoming there would be a great increase of population on the hills surrounding the district.

Population.

Probably the surest way at present of ascertaining this is from the Food Control Office. On December 15th, 1919, 8,400 cards were issued but this does not agree with the estimate made by your Sanitary Inspector, who devoted a lot of time to the question when inspecting the whole district and making a record of the inhabitants of each house while preparing figures for the estimate of the number of houses required in your district. Mr. Stacey then estimated the number of the inhabitants as 8,192. Personally I am of opinion that it will be quite impossible to settle the question until the next census is taken.

I have no hesitation in stating that the social condition of the inhabitants has greatly inproved since the year 1913 owing to the greatly increased rate of wage paid to the industrial population. I am well aware that I shall meet with the argument that if they have been paid more it has cost them more to live, which is quite true. On the other hand the amount of one's weekly income which is spent on the vital necessities of life is quite a small amount when compared to that actually spent, so that even if these are up 100 per cent. the balance left to spend on the less urgent, although perhaps needful objects, must be more.

This was very well illustrated to me when speaking to a member of the industrial class who was telling me he used to get 16s. a week and that now he gets over £2. A third party informed him that he was no better off, but sharp came the retort, "At anyrate it goes there"—putting out his hand—"and I can spend it as I like, and I know which I would rather have."

Forms of Gratuitous Medical Relief.

The Cottage Hospital is still carrying on good work, but could do much more if more accommodation and the necessary funds to carry on were forthcoming.

I am of opinion that this district requires a building at least 3 times the size of the present structure, and even then I think we should always have it full, at any rate in the winter months. I am well aware even if we had this structure the committee in its present financial position would be quite unable to carry on, and under the circumstances can only come to the conclusion that such institutions should no longer depend on the voluntary subscriptions, but should become either State or rate-aided.

The District Nursing Committee.

There is still a lot of truth in the saying that " One does not realize the value of anything until one is without it."

This was well brought home to us during the first six months of 1919, when we were without a district nurse.

Fortunately, one was forthcoming in Nurse Kennett, who took on her duties in July. This committee is also urgently in need of funds, and I am informed that unless some very drastic alteration is made that it will be quite unable to carry on. I do not think that anybody really understands the amount of work that a district nurse has to do or the number of hours that she puts in. As far as the work here is concerned Nurse Kennett acts as District Nurse to the Town, and in her report she tells me that from July 5th to December 31st she put in 1,930 visits. In conjunction with this she acts as nurse under the Bucks Education Committee. During the six months the following work has been done :

Medical Inspection (for 6 months), 5 of 4 hours' duration.....	20
Dental Clinics (for 6 months), 18 approx. of 2 hours' duration.....	36
Attendance at School (for 6 months), 73 of 1½ hours' duration.....	109
Home visits following up cases (for 6 months), 3½ hours' weekly.....	91
School visiting for inspection.....	30
	286

For this amount of work the County Council pay the District Nursing Committee the magnificent sum of £9, which works out just over 7½d. an hour. I cannot think that they really understand the situation. With respect to the remainder of nurse's salary one can hardly congratulate the inhabitants of the town on the result. Nurse is paid £120 a year: if we deduct £18 paid by the County Council, it gives us £102 to be found by the town. Taking the population of the town itself, not including The Moor, which although in the rural district of Amersham is none the less included in the area supplied by the Nursing Committee, at 8,285, which are the figures sent to me as the probable lowest, this salary works out at about 3d. per head per annum. I am convinced that there are very few at present inhabiting the town who could not afford this small sum, and there must be many who could, without any sacrifice on behalf of themselves or their dependents, subscribe a far larger amount.

I feel sure that now this matter has been brought to the notice of all, the support given to this fund will be increased. The amount paid to your District Nurse is quite inadequate to compensate her for the amount of work she does so willingly.

During the year the Nursing Committee have added to their responsibility by guaranteeing financial assistance to the starting of a midwife in the town. I trust the undertaking will be a success, as one was urgently needed.

Chesham Infant Welfare Centre.

This is certainly doing very good work, and the thanks of the community are due to those ladies (voluntary helpers) who are taking such a keen interest in it.

Miss Watt (the Secretary) reports that in December, 1919, there were on the books :—

88 mothers with an average attendance	18
95 infants under 5, with an average attendance	16

I have personally attended this welfare on the first Friday in each month and each time I go I am more struck with the healthy specimens of babyhood that are brought before me. One seldom sees anything really the matter with any of the children.

Dental Clinic.

I am more than satisfied with the improvement in the children's mouths that has been brought about by this, which is held on every Friday during the school terms.

Water Supply.

The town is practically supplied from its own pumping station by means of two reservoirs, one for the high and the other for the low-lying portions of the town.

The water itself is certainly a little hard, but the supply is ample, and the quality good, while risk of contamination is practically nil. The daily average supply during the year has been 322,000 gallons.

Rivers and Streams.

During the early months of this year, owing to the excessive height of the springs, there was again a recurrence of the condition which I have so often had

to report on when one has seen the spring water contaminated with sewage boiling out of the ventilator in the roads and findings its way into the water courses. I believe, however, that during the ensuing twelve months it is your intention to try and take such steps as will prevent this in the future.

Drainage and Sewage.

From remarks I have made in the last paragraph it is evident that these are not as they should be. I am of opinion that the chief cause of the trouble is the house connections in the water-logged area, but at the same time feel that there is a lot to be said for the opinion held by many that at least part of the trouble is due to the sewer from the Pound to the Sewage Farm being of too small a diameter. I can see no other reason to account for the fact that as soon as the sewers become surcharged the ventilator at the Pound is the first one to boil over, although it must be at a considerably higher level than those lower down Waterside.

Water Closet Accommodation.

The six cesspools and eight earth closets still exist in the town, but all are in such places as would render it practically impossible to drain them into the main sewer. With these exceptions the whole town is connected with the main sewer.

I am at times still receiving complaints as to the smells from the ventilators in the roads, but not so much as formerly.

I would, however, suggest in the event of any further discussion on your part as to relaying of sewers, that this matter might be brought to the notice of your engineer with the object of considering the possibility of adopting some system by means of which this might be avoided.

Sewage Farm.

This is, I believe, quite capable of carrying on the work required of it during normal times, but when the sewers are charged full bore with spring water no farm would be large enough to deal with it.

Scavenging.

In my report for the year 1914 I drew your attention to the fact that I was not at all satisfied with the way in which this was allowed to go on. While the war has been on I have kept quiet, as I realised the impossibility of any action being taken. The things I then complained of were :

(1) The collection of refuse from the back of the premises by the Council men. This was decided on before the report was printed, and has continued ever since.

(2) A proper cart with a cover for carrying away the refuse. I am told by your Surveyor (Mr. Price) that he has just lately brought the matter to your notice and that it is under consideration. I trust that your discussion will be in favour, as I do not consider the present system even with the tarpaulin, which is supposed to be there but seldom is seen, at all satisfactory.

(3) The receptacles in which the refuse is stood behind the premises ; I would strongly urge that something should be done in this matter. Your Sanitary Inspector (Mr. Stacey) mentions the matter in his report, and I strongly endorse all he says. Beyond this I have no fault to find with the way in which the work is carried out. Should the district extend to any marked degree it will of course be necessary for you to consider the advisability of erecting a dust destructor, but for the present I am of opinion that the method at present adopted is sufficient.

Sanitary Inspection of the District.

1. *General.*

Your Sanitary Inspector reports as follows :—

During the year—

Number of inspections made (dwelling houses only)	3,534
Number of complaints received	Nil
Nuisances detected without complaint	409
Notices served (formal and informal)	155
Nuisances abated :	
(*a*) By persons responsible	387
(*b*) By Council	Nil
Summonses taken out	1
Convictions	1

2. *House Nuisances.*

Roofs repaired	6
Spouts cleaned and repaired	31
Pavements repaired	Nil
Over-crowding abating	1
Dirty houses cleaned	6
Other housing defects remedied (broken floors, ceilings, etc.)	6

3. *Drains, W.C.'s, etc.*

Drains cleansed, repaired or ventilated	155
Drains cleansed, surface water	22
New drains laid	8
W.C.'s constructed	Nil
W.C.'s repaired	6
W.C.'s supplied with water (formerly without)	Nil
Earth closets previously repaired	Nil
Broken w.c. pans replaced	7
Water fittings to w.c. repaired	143

Premises in Occupation that can be controlled by Bye-Laws and Regulations.

Slaughter Houses.

Number in register..... 8

In all 455 visits have been made to these premises and 1,051 carcases of English meat inspected, but no account has been kept of inspection of Colonial carcases.

During the year the following consignments have been voluntarily surrendered :

English Meat.

Beef	approx.	1640lbs.
Mutton	,,	252lbs.
Pork	,,	414lbs.
Offals (various)	,,	488lbs.
Turkeys (4 very small)	,,	28lbs.

Colonial Meat

Beef	752lbs.
Mutton	90lbs.
Total.....	3665lbs.

During the summer I was asked by your inspector to give my opinion on a consignment of mutton which had been sent to Chesham for human consumption. I had no hesitation in pronouncing the whole consignment as unfit for human food. An inspector was sent down to interview me on the spot, and apparently was not of the same opinion, as, however, a magisterial order for its destruction had already been obtained he was compelled to come to my way of thinking. I am well aware that at that time such conditions of feeding existed as made the matter a very difficult one, but even taking this fact into consideration I still hold that the condition that I saw reflected no credit on the authorities who despatched the consignment. I am opinion that every credit is due to your Sanitary Inspector for the prompt action he took.

Other Food Surrendered.

Grocer's Food.

Bacon	Approx.	340lbs.
Butter	,,	112lbs.
Pressed Beef	,,	14lbs.
Sausages	,,	24lbs.
Dates	,,	1872lbs.
Tinned fruit	,,	2lbs.

Bakehouses.

There are 14 of these on the register at the present time, and 37 visits have been made to these premises. No fault has had to be found with any of them.

Common Lodging Houses.

There are two of these in your district, 3 visits have been made ; the premises are apparently well conducted and kept in conformity with the Bye-laws.

Dairies, Cowsheds and Milkshops.

There are 13 purveyors of milk and 8 cow-keepers on the register ; 10 visits have been paid. No samples of milk have been taken during the year, and I cannot advise with the present state of the law on this point that any should be taken, as it is practically impossible to obtain a conviction.

Factories and Workshops.

No of Factories on the register.....	102
No. of Workshops on the register...	53
No. of visits paid to these premises	62
No. of complaints from H.M. Inspector of Factories.....	8
No. of same attended to.....	8
Requests made for list of outworkers	Nil
No. on list of outworkers (once a year)	3
No. on list of outworkers (twice a year)	3
No. of names of outworkers to the district	Nil
No. of names received from other districts	3

Schools.

There are 5 Elementary Schools in the district, these have been visited from time to time during the year as necessity has arisen.

Housing.

The question of housing in the district is a very acute one and gets worse each month. The amount of overcrowding is deplorable, but your officers are powerless. I have no hesitation in saying that 200 houses are required at once to supply the demands, and a like number will be required within the next few years. There are a number of old cottages in your area that I am anxious to see done away with, but as things are at present it is quite impossible to take any steps with this end in view. I hope, as the new cottages are put up, that some arrangement will be come to so that it can be insured that they are let to the inhabitants of Chesham itself, and not to people from outside, as I am very strongly of opinion that unless something of the sort is done there will be a rush from outside, and the town itself will be left in much the same state that it is now.

Hospital Accommodation.

The Isolation Hospital in The Vale has not been opened during the year. The only diseases I could at all recommend you

to take into this would be scarlet fever or smallpox, and even these I should prefer to keep outside. With respect to scarlet fever, from personal experience we have, I think, more or less, proved that no good is obtained by shifting the patient from his surroundings, provided, of course, a room can be given up to the case. In years gone by when this hospital was in use, it was always crowded out with patients, but when you, as a Council, decided that it was not to be opened, and that the patients were to be nursed in their own homes, the disease disappeared, and we have had nothing but a few sporadic cases since. I do not attempt to explain the matter as I do not know the reason, but the fact remains. As far as smallpox is concerned there has been no case in the town during the time I have been your Medical Officer of Health, now 23 years, and as the County Council have taken to themselves the task of undertaking the treatment of all cases of this disease I do not imagine the hospital will be wanted for this either. Under these circumstances I cannot quite see the use of keeping the building standing. With respect to diphtheria from an isolation standpoint, one might consider the building satisfactory, but as diphtheria is one of those diseases that requires very constant watching and very careful nursing, the fact that it is so far from medical assistance with no method of communication should, I think, at once put it out of court for this disease. From my personal experience as a general practitioner, I have found that they do very well in their own homes if the necessary serum is used at once, and a careful watch kept upon the patient. There are times, I know, when this is impossible, such as when a case occurs in one of the old overcrowded areas, where the accommodation is insufficient for the inhabitants themselves let alone for a case of diphtheria or any other infectious disease.

I have long held the opinion, and I see no reason to alter it at present, that the right method of dealing with the question would be the erection of a hospital for the county as a whole. It is quite impossible for small areas to support an efficient institute such as is really required, but when dealing with a large area the cost must, of necessity, be very much decreased. When I first mentioned this subject some years ago I was met with the argument that transport would be the difficulty, but surely this no longer holds good.

During the year under consideration those cases of diphtheria it has been thought necessary to remove, have gone to the London Fever Hospital, and if this can be done they could be taken to any place within the county.

Notifications.

During the year I have received 52 notifications under the Infectious Diseases Notification Act, made up as follows:

Pulmonary Tuberculosis	5
Other forms of Tuberculosis	3
Cerebral Spinal Fever	2
Ophthalmia Neontorum	1
Diphtheria	13
Scarlet Fever	5
Malaria	11
Pneumonia	5
German Measles	2
Measles	5
Enteric Fever	1

Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

There has been a very marked falling off in the number of cases of this disease.

The disease was made notifiable in 1912.

The following shows the steady fall:

Year.	Pulmonary Tuberculosis.	Other than Pulmonary.
1912	21	—
1913	24	20
1914	14	8
1915	14	5
1916	9	9
1917	12	5
1918	9	3
1919	5	3

If these figures are correct the improvement is certainly remarkable.

Cerebral Spinal Fever.

This disease made its appearance in your district for the first time during this year. The first case that occurred in June recovered, but the second, that of quite a young child, which was notified in November, died on the same day that I received the notification. There was no connection between the two cases.

Diphtheria.

We have had a very poor year as far as this disease is concerned, and unfortunately the malady seems to be steadily on the increase in your district. Taking the last 10 years, the number of cases have been as follows:—

1910	Nil.
1911	1
1912	3
1913	3
1914	3
1915	1
1916	Nil.
1917	2
1918	4
1919	13

During the year all the cases have occurred in Broad-street, High-street, and the old property in Church-street and Germain-street.

At present I am unable to point to anything as the actual cause, and as the cases have been spread all over the year there is little to help one.

Scarlet Fever.

Three of the cases occurred in the same house, and the other two in different houses at different times, which points to the fact that none of them arose from contact with the original trouble.

Pneumonia.

I have received 5 notifications of pneumonia during the year, but the fact that 5 persons have died from this disease during the year points rather to the fact that some cases must have escaped notification as the mortality can hardly be 100 per cent. I am of opinion that many members of the profession cannot quite see the advantage to be derived from this indiscriminate notification of diseases, and as the bait held out is to say the least not generous, we, and I will include myself as a general practitioner, have shown rather a tendency to grow careless. Personally I think that those in authority have only themselves to thank for it. The fee was suddenly dropped from 2s. 6d. to Is., and at the same time the list of notifiable diseases was increased. In fact, it became a case of do more work but get less for it, a condition which hardly falls in with the spirit of this age. And, after all, what is a 1s. fee when one has to expend 2d. of it on a stamp to send the report to the Medical Officer of Health.

Measles and German Measles.

As these diseases have now been removed from the list of those notifiable nothing need be said about them, except that we may congratulate ourselves that no bad outbreak occurred during the time the diseases were on the list.

Enteric Fever.

One case has been notified during this year. This was undoubtedly an imported case.

During the year serums have been supplied at the Council's expense to several cases of diphtheria with good results.

Death Rate.

The number of deaths registered during the year in this district is 100, which gives us a death rate of 12.0.

In looking through the list of diseases from which these deaths have occurred, one is rather struck by the number of cases of death from cancer. Certainly 20 out of 100 deaths seems a big proportion, and the question arises is this disease on the increase? I do not think so; my opinion is that the reason is to be found in the increased power of diagnosis on the part of the members of the medical profession.

Birth Rate.

The number of births registered during the year is 119, an increase of 2 on last year's figures. These figures give a birth rate of 12.6. I can only say that I am hoping for better figures to put before you next year.

Infant Mortality.

Of the 100 deaths registered 3 only have been those of children under 1 year and of these one was a premature birth. These figures give us an infant mortality of 25.6 per 1,000 births registered, which one must consider quite satisfactory.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I wish to thank you for the support that you have given me during the year, and to remain,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS F. LONG,

Medical Officer of Health.

Chesham Press, Chesham.